

Assisting Australian fruit growers compete in a changing world

In the 40 years that the Australian Nurseryman's Fruit Improvement Company (ANFIC) has been in operation, they have imported nearly 1,800 fruit varieties and rootstocks. CEO Gavin Porter says this is just one of the things that makes the company unique.

Gavin Porter knows his fruit trees. He has a PhD in botany from the University of Queensland, has been with ANFIC for more than 20 years, and is also CEO of the Associated International Group of Nurseries. ANFIC, a not-for-profit company, was established in 1983 to assist fruit growers in Australia to compete in global markets by introducing new, improved varieties, and by establishing IP rights to protect these varieties from unauthorized propagation and production.

One aim of ANFIC's research and development with new variety introductions, is to reduce the need for chemical use and find varieties able to withstand the changing climate, without the use of GMOs. ANFIC works closely with breeders to evaluate varieties overlooked in the past, but which may prove more resilient. Observing parent trees with genes that make them naturally resistant to disease and breed with them, using conventional breeding techniques, to provide varieties also with the best taste and quality.

Of the tens of thousands of seedlings planted each year for evaluation by fruit breeders, less than 1 per cent will be commercialised. "It's a numbers game," Gavin says. "The more seedlings you plant out to evaluate once they fruit, the more chance you've got of finding one that's going to be a great commercial variety."

ANFIC is currently in the process of commercializing a new seedless mandarin variety, a process that takes

longer than many people, even those in the industry, realise. This variety was imported into

plant quarantine in 2002. It will be more than 20 years since initial importation, distribution to trial growers around Australia, variety evaluation and eventually commercial fruit production in Australian orchards.

"It's very difficult for Australia to compete on the world scale with our exports, so we've got to do things smarter and more efficiently with higher productivity and better quality. Working with the global marketing models with the same fruit varieties we grow in Australia, can provide our Australian growers with the best chance of success in these export markets with counter-seasonal production. It's ANFIC's unique level of skill and experience that enables us to do the job we do for Australian fruit industries," Gavin says.

